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The New Conference at The Hague.

The attention of people everywhere is now turning to the New Conference which is soon to gather at The Hague. For more than a year, or ever since the Interparliamentary deputation saw the President in Washington in September of last year, the meeting of a second conference like that of 1899 has been assured. Now that the Russo-Japanese war is out of the way active preparations are being made for the meeting.

The turn in affairs by which the Czar of Russia is to issue the official invitations to the Conference has come as a real surprise to many. President Roosevelt had already, through Mr. Hay, addressed an inquiry to the various governments, and they had all expressed themselves as ready to join in the Conference as soon as the proper time should come. It was therefore expected by everybody that the initiative taken by the President would be followed up as soon as the Eastern war was over, and that the formal invitations to the meeting would be sent out by the Netherlands government in the name of the United States. It seems to us still that that course ought to have been followed, in order to secure the best results from the meeting.

One can well understand the wish of the Czar, who called the first conference, to be the promoter of

the second also. His desire to do this must have been greatly increased by the discredit which the war has cast upon him as a promoter of peace. This has no doubt brought great distress to him, and his desire to restore the confidence lost is a most laudable one, particularly as he is known to be a sincere friend of peace, and was from the beginning opposed to the policy of the State Council which brought on war. He was practically helpless in the situation, and as the head of the state had to appear in a rôle which was extremely distasteful to him.

President Roosevelt's willingness to step aside and let the Czar lead in convoking the Conference is, under all the circumstances, an act of great considerateness and courtesy. It is a fine example of a spirit which has been all too rare in international relations, and will tend to make the influence of the United States in the deliberations perhaps even stronger than it would have been if the meeting had been convened by the President. The credit, however, of initiating the movement for the assembling of the Conference will always rightly be given to Mr. Roosevelt.

The Conference is to meet, — that is the important thing. It will differ from the first Conference in being a real world gathering. The South and Central American republics are included in the invitation, as they were not in 1898, and they will doubtless all send representatives. So that instead of twenty-six powers participating, there will be some forty-four. That will give a significance to the Conference which the first, great as it was, did not have.

It has been hinted in some papers that the principal business of the Conference will be to deal with certain questions of the laws of war which have been made prominent by the Russo-Japanese conflict. This we do not believe. Certain laws of war, particularly as regards the rights of neutrals, will be dealt with, but that will constitute a very minor part of the work. The Conference must not be, will not be, allowed to degenerate into a mere post-bellum meeting for the arrangement of certain details of the conduct of fighting. It is to be like the first, a great constructive Peace Conference, whose chief task will be to lay more broadly and deeply the foundations of a juridic order which will ensure to the world general peace, and usher in an era when there will be little or no need for rules of war. The public sentiment of the civilized world will be vastly more potent at The Hague this time than it was seven years ago,

and it will insist that the Conference give its attention to the high tasks of constructive work for which its calling has been demanded.

It is not possible just yet to determine all the subjects which will be put upon the program, but in general they are well understood and mapped out. The Interparliamentary Union, the Peace Congress, the International Law Association, the National Peace Conferences, eminent diplomats and international jurists, the great monthly and weekly journals, etc., have all been studying the topics with which the Conference ought to deal and making practical suggestions thereon.

There is considerable skepticism as to the possibility of getting the question of reduction or limitation of armaments practically dealt with. But the demand for their arrest and reduction has become so great and so insistent that it will be difficult for the Conference to neglect the subject, and we shall be surprised if some practical step, even if small, is not taken. A general treaty of obligatory arbitration for all the nations, stipulating final recourse to the Hague Court for, at least, certain classes of controversies, is certain to find a leading place in the deliberations. The numerous arbitration treaties which have already been concluded between the nations of Europe and those of South America, two and two, have paved the way and created a strong demand for something more general and comprehensive. There is a third subject which will take, or ought to take, a commanding place in the deliberations, namely, that of the establishment of a regular congress or parliament of the nations to meet periodically for the discussion of international problems. The interest in this proposal that has developed since the Massachusetts Legislature first brought it practically before the public, has been quite unprecedented, and there will be an almost irresistible demand from many sources that it be dealt with at The Hague. Many are hoping that, as a beginning of a practical solution of the question, the coming Conference may recommend to the governments that The Hague meetings may be made regular and periodic hereafter. Out of that everything else would grow in time.

Among the other subjects whose consideration will naturally come up will be (a) the rights and duties of neutrals, (b) the inviolability of private property at sea in time of war, (c) the codification of international law, (d) the renewal of certain expired conventions of the first Hague Conference, (e) and the extension of the principle of neutralization to further territories and waterways, including, it is to be hoped, the neutralization of the great trade routes on the ocean, as proposed by the Massachusetts State Board of Trade.

In order that this new Hague Conference may accomplish all that needs to be done, there ought to be, as there was in the case of the meeting in 1899, a great

uprising and expression of public interest in the work which is expected of it. It ought to be talked about, and written about, and "resolved" about, and prayed and preached about, until the whole public atmosphere becomes surcharged with the force of it. In this direction lies for the moment the duty of every one of us. It will not yet do to take too much for granted. The first Hague Conference was saved from uselessness and powerfully vitalized by the crusade which preceded and attended it, and though there is not the danger of failure in this case that there was in that, yet the coming Conference will accomplish a great work or a small one, in proportion to the amount of intelligent public pressure that is brought to bear upon it.

Some Lessons of the Russo-Japanese War.

It is not possible yet to draw all the lessons of the conflict. Some of the most certain fruits of war are gathered only after many years. It will be so in this case. But there are lessons which require no time to understand, and the sooner they are allowed to come home to men the better for the world.

We do not refer here to such lessons as the military and naval promoters have drawn from the fighting. They have been quick to turn the processes of the war to their own purposes. They have found their theories of the necessity of big battleships, or of swarming flotillas of torpedo boats, or of special forms of tactics, forts, bayonet charges, etc., supported or knocked over, and they hurry to have these lessons applied to the armaments and war training of their own countries. They ask for bigger ships and stouter fortifications and deadlier explosives. With these lessons we have nothing to do. They have to do with the art of death and destruction, of conquest and humiliation of fellowmen, and we leave them to those who still believe in international duelling and international slaughter.

One of the most evident lessons of the war is the one to which we called attention last month in commenting on the riots and lawlessness in Japan which followed the Peace of Portsmouth. War militarizes a people, always and everywhere. The effect may be measurably counteracted in many ways, but it is always there, like a virus in the veins. Japan and Russia, instead of tiring and growing sick of their armies and navies which have brought them so much disaster and suffering and financial burden, have immediately set their hearts upon having larger, more deadly and expensive ones. Russia will build a new navy as good as the best in the world. The Japanese ship yards will be kept busy vying with those of her big "enemy." And so, in all probability, the two peoples, in spite of appearances and all efforts to the contrary, will stand over against each other in the